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Stairway to hell?

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The INQUIRER

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Inquiring Words *Best plans up in flames*

I went to see the Olympic Torch last Sunday morning. I had to get up early but it was going to pass along the road at the end of my road so it was an opportunity not to be missed and it couldn't have been made any easier for me. So I pulled on my clothes and grabbed my umbrella on the way out. It wasn't raining so that was a relief!

I walked briskly along the road fearing that my optimism in turning up only 15 minutes before it was due to pass would be a big mistake and I wouldn't get near. I'm not very tall so I wouldn't be able to see from the back. I'd even remembered my camera.

I was so relieved when I realised that there was lots of space and I could stand right on the edge of the pavement. Then I worked out that I could stand on the traffic island and be even closer. There was a nice woman there with her camera and an umbrella leant on the rail and a tall man with a camera. We were going to have a great view, front on of the torch. As we got nearer the time more people arrived and stood in front of us. "Excuse me!" said the woman. "I've been here since 7.30!" She was ignored. Then a mum arrived with her iPad and stood in front of me. The woman in front of her was smoking. "I can't stand people who smoke in public!" she said. "It shouldn't be allowed" "I can't stand people who stand in front of me!" I thought! At the very last minute a family arrived with a young boy who, of course, had to go at the front.

Someone encouraged the woman at the rail to come round for a better view. But she had to leave her carefully propped umbrella. So we were all set. The Coke bus had gone past and it was "only five minutes till the torch!" Traffic was still coming down the road and I was worried someone would be run over. People constantly moved and stretched to get a good photo and some were taking videos but I didn't know how to do that on my camera. I was still in flight or fight mode knowing full well that I would have to be alert and constantly defend my position and right to see. I knew that there were those sorts out there who never obey the rules and would beat me otherwise. My sinews were strengthened. My eyes were gimlets. I was prepared!

Then a policeman came along and moved us for our safety off the traffic island to the far side of the road. I was at the front again but just as the torch went past a large policeman walked in front of me.

So I thought "That's a bit like life innit?" You plan, you fight. Everything seems to be working out OK. Then someone comes along and queers your pitch. You resent them and make ready your revenge. But then a higher authority wanders in completely oblivious to your egotistical desires and renders it all pointless.

I dunno. What do you think?

Strangely I saw a girl in a white track suit holding a torch on a nearby pathway, so I got a really close-up look. But it wasn't flaming – not like a Unitarian!

– Nicky Jenkins



Clarification

The article headlined, 'Is this what apostles thought?' published in the 23 June 'Inquirer' was an original piece of writing. The Rev Dr David Usher used the news of a recent discovery of biblical-era books to inspire a parable about the Unitarian movement.

With thanks

The colour cover was sponsored by the Yorkshire Unitarian Union.



London Underground photo by Nic Kilby

Hell and the Underground

Famously, the Universalists thought God was too good to damn them; the smug Bostonian Unitarians thought they were too good to be damned. **Frank Walker** wonders if hell is a bit closer to home.

I have been thinking of hell and of how the London Underground is a fitting symbol for it. Of the reality of hell in this life we can have no doubt. It is created by the self-destructiveness, cruelty and hatred of human beings. Natural calamities such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, although they cause vast destruction and fearful suffering, do not seem adequate images of hell because they lack any evil intention – they are simply an expression and re-alignment of natural forces that take place without any regard for human or animal welfare. The destruction wrought by human hatred in such places as modern Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan (to name but a few) seems truly hellish.

Traditionally, damnation in hell after death was deemed the fitting punishment for unrepentant evildoers. Universalists and Unitarians protested against this doctrine. (Notoriously the Universalists thought God was too good to damn them; the smug Bostonian Unitarians thought they were too good to be damned). These days the doctrine is seldom asserted in the literal ways in which past centuries envisaged it.

Subtle thinkers have mocked Unitarians for the naivety of

their conception of hell. The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana says that as an imaginative Catholic boy he found no problem with hell and eternal damnation, unlike the innocent Unitarians who shuddered at it, or the innocent Calvinists who were overawed by it. The poetic mansions of heaven must also house the dungeons of hell – dramatic logic required it. Damnation must be eternal, he says, because no act can be annulled. Even though it may be forgotten or forgiven, it will always be true that it was done. He never had the least fear of a material hell or any desire for a material heaven. Do not confuse poetry with fact. That is well said, though for centuries Christians did make such a confusion in very cruel ways.

TS Eliot maintained that the possibility of eternal damnation made life profoundly serious. No doubt – but once again, do not confuse poetry with fact. The Universalist and Unitarian protests against literalist doctrines of hell were much needed. This did not mean that they were necessarily naive. TS Eliot's grandfather, the great Unitarian minister William Greenleaf Eliot of St Louis, Missouri, faced hell in the destruction and horror caused by the American Civil War. He confronted the suffering of hell by organising medical care for the sick and wounded throughout the Western states. He was a partner of his colleague Henry Whitney Bellows, the leading Unitarian minister in New York City, who at the onset of the war had gone to President Abraham Lincoln with a group of medical men and ministers. "We must do something to care for this war's sick and wounded," he said. The President agreed and invited Bellows to organise such care. Unitarians took a lead in this great humanitarian work. They faced the hell of the Civil War and tried to rescue its victims. They were not foolishly

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Celebrate a work of creative imagination

(Continued from previous page)
naive.

As a member of an aristocratic New England family TS Eliot found the common herd distasteful. In his *Four Quartets* he recoils from the mental emptiness that he senses behind the faces of the travellers on the Underground, with their strained time-ridden faces distracted from distraction by distraction, with their unwholesome lungs and unhealthy souls living in darkness, men and bits of paper whirled in the cold wind, signs of the inoperancy of spirit. Travelling on the Underground is a journey in hell. During the rush-hour many are still tempted to agree with him.

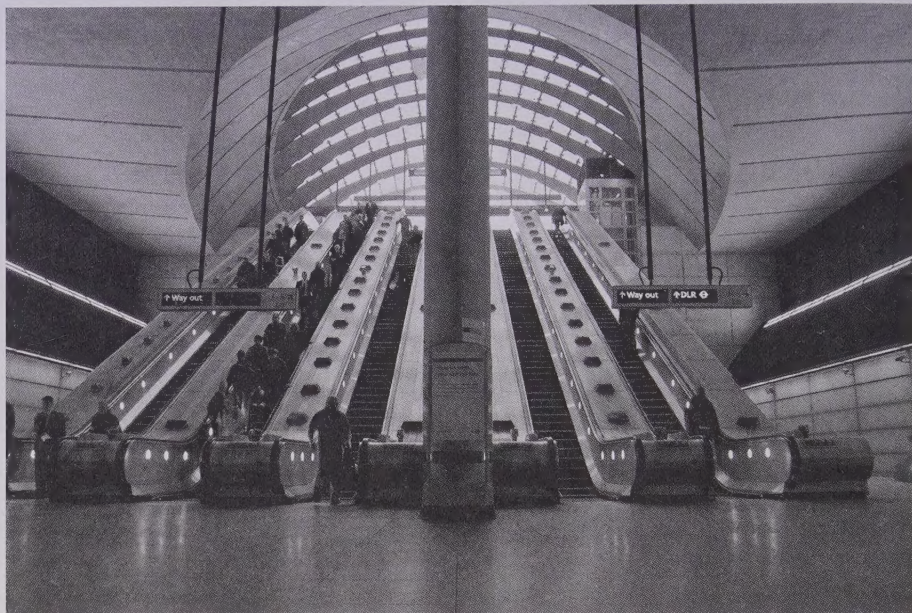
One recent Sunday afternoon I decided to take a friend to a conference on The Future of Religion, a Christian-Buddhist dialogue, at Friends' House, Euston Road.

We began with a walk through Greenwich Park with its delightful views of the Queen's House, the Observatory, the old Royal Naval College, the Thames and beyond to the new skyscrapers of Canary Wharf, the Millennium Dome, the Gherkin, the Shard, the London Eye and Big Ben and so on. Encouraging! From Greenwich to London Bridge our train took us on a depressing ride through Deptford, torn apart by thoughtless and insensitive planning resulting in dullness and ugliness, relieved occasionally by glimpses of splendid 17th century churches and their leafy graveyards. Not so encouraging. Woe to those ignorant and selfish architects who destroy London's beauty and humanity! Were we about to descend into hell?

At London Bridge we pushed our way into the Underground. The crowds seemed thicker than in the rush hour. We could have been in people-choked Istanbul or Tokyo. I might well have echoed TS Eliot, but my meditations took a different turn.

In London the rich ride in taxis or travel by chauffeured limousine. They do not take the Underground, which is the preserve of so-called ordinary people (whom God must presumably love very much since he made so many of them). As an elderly person carefully negotiating my way through the crowd, I did not find people to be like scraps of paper blowing about aimlessly. No, I was reminded of a phrase from John Keats: these creatures have a purpose and their eyes are bright with it, they seem to know where they are going and are certainly determined to get there. Our train was so packed that my friend and I were forced to stand until King's Cross. I felt reassured that in our late 70s and early 80s we were still strong and agile enough to do this.

I thought what a piece of work the Underground is! I marvelled at the creative imagination of Victorian engineers who first conceived this great project. The heroism of the navvies who had dug the first tunnels without benefit of modern machinery. The inventors and scientists who had constructed the electric trains and their rail systems as well as the escalators and lifts which speeded passengers on their way. The administrators who devised intricate and accurate timetables that



Perhaps the Underground is a bit closer to heaven. Photo by James Wilsher

ensured that trains driven by alert and conscientious skilled drivers ran on time and avoided crashes. The ticket office staff and cleaners who prevented British untidiness being as destructive as it might be. A great society working together for human well-being so that millions may safely travel on their daily round of work and pleasure, vastly extending the scope of human connectedness. Truly they will maintain the fabric of the world and the handiwork of their craft is their prayer. An inspiring achievement, surely, Mr Eliot, and more like the kingdom of heaven than the abode of hell?

In the movement of millions humane feeling is not extinct. What would happen if a child were to be found lost and weeping, or an elderly person collapsed? Doubtless many, wrapped up in their own affairs and desperate to keep an appointment, would pass by on the other side. I hope I am at least as sombre and realistic in my estimate of human nature as TS Eliot, but I am confident that someone would stop and help. When accidents happen, we find people will risk their lives to rescue and comfort the afflicted. That is heaven, not hell.

At Friends' House we listened to Don Cupitt and Stephen Batchelor discussing the future of religion. During the interval I talked to my neighbours, two women teachers who attended classes at Heythrop College. (This Catholic college moved from its palace in the Cotswolds to central London so that more people could benefit from its part-time courses.) One lady wanted to know more about the network for religious radicals known as 'The Sea of Faith'. As one of the original members of the conference at Loughborough University that inaugurated the network in 1987 I was able to enlighten her. "I must warn you, though," I confessed, "I am a retired Unitarian minister so you will consider me a dangerous and disgraceful person."

"Oh no, not at all!" they graciously quipped. (At Friends' House everyone is wonderfully polite.)

"You mustn't think I am anti-Catholic," I went on. "I have an Italian-Catholic daughter-in-law, and my youngest grandson is Catholic, though he's too young to know it. I have even preached in a Catholic Church (don't tell the Archbishop). Im-

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Fight for equal marriage continues

By Derek McAuley

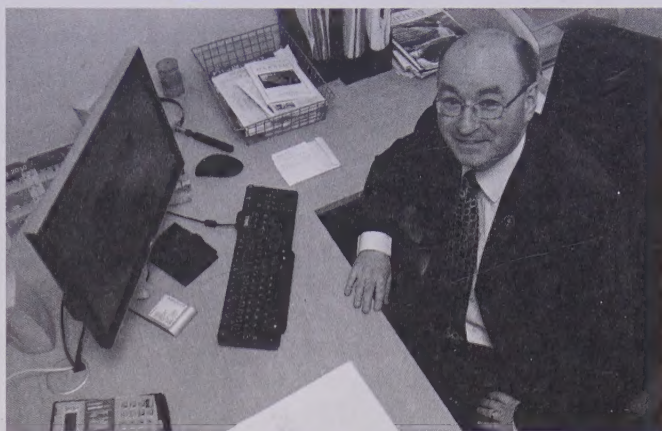
Equal Marriage has rocketed up the political agenda over the last couple of weeks and I have been active in promoting the General Assembly's views as events developed. We have garnered press coverage, including mentions in *The Independent* and on BBC Radio News, as well as online. I participated in a meeting of faith leaders who support equal marriage with shadow home secretary and welcomed one more denomination to the cause when the United Reformed Church voted to push for full equality in marriage.

The roundtable meeting was called by Yvette Cooper MP, Shadow Home Secretary on 4 July. She supports religious marriages for same sex-couples within faith groups willing to perform them. The meeting was an excellent springboard for further joint work, as we need to keep reminding the government and the public that some faith groups support equal marriage.

This was the first gathering of representatives from religious groups that support equal marriage. Paul Parker leader of the Quakers, Rabbi Shulamit Ambalu of Liberal Judaism, Rabbi Roderick Young from the Movement for Reform Judaism and I gathered along with senior Anglicans – including Giles Fraser, former Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral, Jeffrey John, Dean of St Albans and Lord Harries of Pentregarth, the former Bishop of Oxford. Chris Bryant MP, Shadow Minister at the Home Office and Kate Green MP, Shadow Equalities Minister were also present. It was also good to have Sharon Ferguson of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement and Metropolitan Community Church and Sam Dick, Head of Policy at Stonewell, participate.

I was able to share the Unitarian experience of registering buildings for civil partnerships and performing a ceremony in a way that ensured that the legalities were addressed. I emphasised that while civil partnerships in religious premises are welcomed by Unitarians, they are not a substitute for religious marriage. I highlighted that the policy is not working as intended by Ministers, as six months after the implementation very few religious premises have registered, due primarily to the cost and confusion and uncertainty about registration processes.

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg MP expressed his personal support for same-sex couples to marry in places of worship. In response to a joint letter from Paul Parker, Rabbi



Derek McAuley at Essex Hall. Photo by James Barry

Danny Rich of Liberal Judaism and myself, he wrote that organisations which wish to conduct same-sex marriages should be free to do so. His view goes beyond the proposals in the recent consultation which limited same-sex marriage to civil ceremonies. See the letter and response on the next page.

More good news spread when the United Reformed Church (URC) General Assembly voted to allow their churches to host civil partnership ceremonies for same-sex couples. I congratulated them on behalf of our movement, writing a letter to the Rev Roberta Rominger, URC General Secretary.

This is a significant decision by the URC and is another step forward towards full inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people within the churches. The URC works closely with the Methodists and Baptists in the Joint Public Issues Team and have this year sought a closer relationship with the Church of England. It will be interesting to read the theological reasons for this decision and whether or not this results eventually in support for equal marriage. I hope it will.

I asked the URC to join us in addressing some of the impediments to churches seeking licences to perform civil partnerships.

It has been a busy time but it is clear that we have made major progress. It is likely that there is already a majority in the House of Commons for equal civil marriage. The challenge is to persuade Parliament to give faith groups that wish to conduct religious marriages the freedom to do so.

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

Whitman would pen a hymn of praise

(Continued from previous page)

possible in England, of course: it was at the nuptial mass for my son and his bride in Italy. The priest made no objection. I spoke in Italian and English and based my remarks on St Paul's great Hymn to Love, to which no Catholic could object. The Italians were very kind. They said that normally they never listened to sermons, but they did listen to this one."

Suddenly I was blessed with an intense awareness of the sheer goodness of these two Catholic ladies. How lovely they were – utterly lovely! To teach Religious Education in London comprehensive schools – what an impossible job! And yet they did it, against all the odds, with such grace and serenity! I thought of this world of suffering and of the great charitable Orders of the Catholic Church with their world-wide works of mercy and humanity. I listened appreciatively to dear old Don

Cupitt and his critical but inspiring religious humanism, and to Stephen Batchelor transmitting to us Westerners the ancient power of the Buddha, energising us so we can face suffering and surmount it. I sensed afresh something that so often eludes us: the deep reality of human goodness. We may well feel the drunkenness of things being so various: human vineyards are so many, with vintages so different, but each so rare and perfect in its own way. An intoxicating thought!

My day of happy meditation had been made possible by the Underground. If only I were Walt Whitman, I would pen a hymn of praise to it. Praise, praise, praise, for the London Underground and all who make it possible, for all souls who scurry through her so purposefully, bravely maintaining the fabric of the world! Bless them! Yes, Mr Eliot: operancy of spirit!

The Rev Frank Walker is minister emeritus at Cambridge.

Deputy PM for equal marriage



Excerpt from the letter to Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Deputy Prime Minister, sent jointly by Derek McAuley, Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain; and Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive for Liberal Judaism:

We welcome your commitment to change marriage laws to enable same-sex partners to marry and offer you our prayerful support at this time. We know that you are hearing strong views about this from all around you.

Quakers in Britain, Unitarians and Liberal Judaism are all committed to equality of marriage and ask that any legislation will mean we are free to conduct same-sex marriages in our places of

worship.

This is about religious liberty for us, so we don't expect parliament to force others, who may disagree with us, to marry same-sex couples if they do not wish. We urge you to stand firm and show moral leadership on this issue, which affects the lives of many real people in this country. If, as you have said, same-sex marriage is the right thing to do, then it's right to do it properly, and it's right to do it now.

We would welcome your assurance that this issue remains a priority of the coalition government.

The full text of the reply from the Deputy Prime Minister:

Many thanks for your letter. I very much appreciate you taking the time to get in touch.

As I am sure you are aware, I personally have long supported the right of those in same-sex relationships to marry. I am also pleased to say that at our party conference in September 2010, the Liberal Democrats became the first political party to adopt this position as our official policy.

Civil partnerships were an important first step. But marriage is an important institution based on love and commitment, and I believe that it is a 21st century human right for that choice to be available to all - gay or straight. So I am proud that this Coalition Government has now committed to introduce equal marriage and has confirmed that we will legislate by 2015.

Many couples also want to honour their commitment in their place of worship. So I am also pleased that this government recently brought forward legislation to allow civil partnerships to take place on religious premises.

The Government has been clear, and I am clear, that no religious organisation who does not wish to conduct a same-sex marriage should be forced to do so. As you so rightly say in your letter, it is important that we protect religious liberty. But religious liberty means allowing those churches and organisations who want to open their doors and welcome same-sex couples to do so, as much as it means respecting the rights of those who do not.

The scope of the Government's consultation covers equal civil marriage and we are currently in the process of considering the large number of responses. These will help inform the Government's response to the consultation - which we expect to publish later this year.

But it is Liberal Democrat party policy, and my personal view, that those organisations who do wish to conduct same-sex marriages, such as the Quakers, the Unitarians and the Liberal Jews, should be free to do so.

It is not the place of government to mandate religious organisations to conduct gay marriages. But nor is it the place of government to ban them from doing so. Thank you again for contacting me about this issue.

Nick Clegg MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Deputy Prime Minister

Equality: Wh

If Unitarians need a cause by which to be known surely it must be equality says John Hands

In a recent editorial in 'The Unitarian' the editor Yvonne Aburrow suggested that just as Quakers have placed Peace as the identifying, animating concept in their teaching and altruistic work, so as Unitarians might consider centring our teaching upon the concept of equality. In a subsequent article Nicky Watson wrote that 'Unitarians do not discriminate' was the line from our website which first attracted her to Unitarianism. She has come to believe that we do truly believe in a plurality of beliefs, welcoming these differences of attitude and belief, but not seeing any of them as less equal than any others.

However in conclusion she did also ask: 'Does this diverse range of personal preferences mean that we lack focus? Or does it mean that for equality in all areas is important? I am writing in support of our placing the cardinal principle of equality at the centre of our Unitarian approach to religion, but wonder how far we can be urged to maintain it.'

It is, of course, apparent that in so many of our respects we are all far from being equal to one another. Some of us have physical aspects of appearance which are considered more or less desirable or fashionable in our society. Some of us are more or less intelligent or wealthier than others, or more proficient in our work, and so forth. Clearly we are to justify the principle of equality in the face of these and many other differences we must appeal to potent values underlying all of this. What are these fundamental values? And do they derive from and continue to require belief in a supreme deity or God? If not, how can equality be justified in the face of the competitive thrust of differences which seem essential to the development of material culture and society?

Seeking a unifying principle

In light of these objections, I believe there are two responses we can make which are related, which might be acceptable both to those of us who believe in a supreme deity and those of us who do not believe in a divine source of all things acting at work in the universe, but who do urge the need for a unifying principle or principles which guide our conduct.

My first response clearly arises out of the teaching in the New Testament that God allows rain to fall on the just and the unjust, the righteous and the unrighteous. He-She may punish the unjust in various ways in this world or the next, but does not cease to regard them as more or less equal in his/her love for them. The parable of the prodigal son so memorably brings this home to us.

...actually is it, and how can we act upon it?

Equality in love is the second broad principle I would make, which embraces both believers and unbelievers alike: complete and unqualified by considerations of interest or material advantage. Unless we act towards one another as essentially equal and worthy persons, genuine loving friendship between us is impossible. As the theologian Martin Buber proclaimed, without a full recognition of our equal worth I cannot relate to you as a 'thou'.

A certain degree of affection, fellowship and mutual regard for each other can flourish, and sometimes does arise between participants in business and everyday transactions: and in particular circumstances, no doubt this affection may be able to transcend the limitations of commercial self-interest. But if we believe that a fullness of love between us is possible, we can only relate to each other in ways which presuppose our complete equality as persons, and can no longer relate to gain personal or pecuniary advantage over each other.

Perhaps I should say that I am not imagining that such an intimacy of love for one or more persons involves an erotic interest. It may be, or it may not become so, but a full other-regarding personal relationship does not require such an involvement. In fact as we know, our relationship for another may call for a measure of restraint in our conduct towards them. Without such restraint, love between persons can create or destroy an intimate, fulfilling relationship.

True love is unearned

Undoubtedly such relationships may seem to be rare. Or perhaps they only seem to be so in a cultural climate such as most of us live in today, where sexual fulfilment is generally assumed to underlie most close friendships, even if unexpressed. But I would draw attention to the writings of Ian Suttie, an early Freudian revisionist, whose analysis of child development firmly places love given and received between parent and child to be our primal need, continuing and maturing in the life of the growing child and the adult parent as parent-surrogate.

What I would like to say is that there is another vital aspect of our capacity for reciprocal loving relationships. And this is that we should not of course, assume that spontaneous unequivocal love can be in any sense earned or deserved. It is beyond the jurisdiction of just deserts, and can only arise spontaneously as an act of love between us. And the prime condition of being able to evoke the capacity of loving in ourselves and between ourselves and others, is that we should believe unreservedly that we are entirely equal as persons to each other. This is what confers upon each one of us a dignity quite other than regard for any acquisitions or attributes we may possess. And it is a dignity of personal worth which cannot be required or earned by what may be considered achievement in any way. To those we love, as to those we call our friends we can consider ourselves equal to them in spirit and in need. A real reciprocity of love transcends any other attributes we or they may possess.



Women's equality is just one aspect of what we can strive for. Wikimedia Commons illustration

In this connection I think it is important for us as persons and as Unitarians to recognise that our recognition of essential equality of being is not an ideal which may perhaps be achieved in heaven, beyond the trammels and limitations of this world. It is a value, or a principle which, if we can accept it, can animate our conduct towards others and the Natural world. In seeking to widen and deepen our loving practice towards each other and the world of Nature, I think we need to admit that what we seek to do may be often within our reach, but not yet within our grasp. It is a correlate of our rejecting idealism in favour of actual religious practice that we acknowledge that in so doing we will often fall short of doing the best we can conceive of at any particular time or circumstances. To forgive ourselves and each other for what is not yet within our grasp seems to me an essential aspect of loving both others and ourselves. This is made clear to us in the New Testament where in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also tells us that the virtue of hu-

umility (recognising the beam in our own eye rather than the mote in someone else's) is also an essential aspect of our being able to love other people.

Power is neutral, seeking is not

From this recognition of our need for humility, we see also that to seek to gain power over others is a hazardous undertaking. Clearly power in itself is morally neutral. The danger for us is the way in which we acquire power and our exercise of it. Without a real recognition of our equality as persons we are likely to fail to recognise or ignore the intrusion of our prideful narcissism. Love of power, and the ego satisfactions it entails, is likely to lead to an addiction which, like other forms of addiction, inevitably excludes genuine reciprocal love. Love of other people, arising spontaneously, or in moments of blissful transcendence calls for energy, perseverance and application.

Perhaps we can say more. If we could feel the fullness of it, we would recognise that it is our most essential duty – to ourselves and to others. And love of power is the chimera or pitfall which, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, intoxicates our senses and lures us into the mountain of oblivion and isolation.

Shakespeare put it well

But I will end with part of his consummate tribute to the power of love which Shakespeare wrote in one of his most moving sonnets. (CXVI)

Love's not Time's fool, although rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come,
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

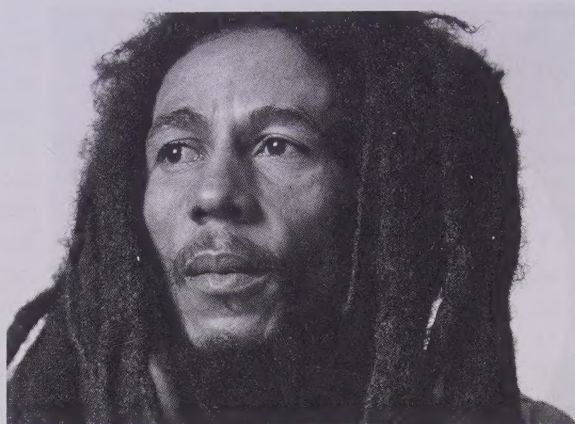
If this be error and upon me proved
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

John Hands is a member of Essex Church, Kensington.

Marley: Great film about a great man

By Bob Pounder

Next month, the DVD *Marley*, a documentary on the life of Bob Marley will be released. I thought that this was a fantastic film comprising archive footage of his performances, interviews, and original film clips of some of the great moments in his life. I would recommend you rent this film. It's about revolutionary love. It illustrates the life of Bob Marley plus an insight into the mind, thoughts and actions of a great man who had a message for the world.



Bob Marley Image.net photo

Bob Marley was born in Jamaica in 1945. His father Norval Sinclair Marley, a former soldier with the British Army, was white, whilst his mother Cedella Booker was black. Marley's father died by the time he was 10 and Marley grew up in the poor rural areas of Jamaica and later in the slums of Trenchtown outside Kingston, the capital. If the poverty wasn't bad enough, he also had to contend with the question of his own identity. In his early years his authenticity as a person in his own right was deeply affected by his mixed-race heritage. To put it bluntly, he was not seen as a genuine black man because of his lighter features. And, later we see he suffers further rejection at the hands of his white relations when he visits the Norval Marley UK construction company offices. Martin Luther King once said, 'I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character.' In the same spirit Bob Marley commented on the question of race by saying, 'I don't have prejudice against meself. My father was a white and my mother was black. Them call me half-caste or whatever. Me don't deh pon nobody's side. Me don't deh pon the black man's side nor the white man's side. Me deh pon God's side, the one who create me and cause me to come from black and white.'

It was obvious to the young Bob Marley that music was going to be his life. At 17 he made his first single record titled 'Judge Not'. This was not the launch of his successful career. But perhaps we can see the direction of his future growth. Bob Marley was essentially a religious man, and the words from 'Judge Not' are reminiscent of the biblical text from Matthew 7:1-2 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'

The words to his song titled 'Cornerstone' also have biblical roots. The song was inspired by Marley's sense of rejection after visiting the family company. We have the story of Jesus' reading of the scriptures at Nazareth where he announced the nature of his mission and who he really was. There was a great deal of anger and Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown'. He was then driven out of Nazareth. Rejection of the Prophets is a constant theme in both the Old and the New Testaments: Psalm 118:22-24, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'

Marley sang: *The stone that the builder refused, will always be the head cornerstone*

The film showed that Marley's white relations recognised *Cornerstone* was prophetic and the name Marley become famous only through the life and work of Bob Marley. The rejected stone became the capstone. Marley became a world-class performer, a prophet, a spokesman for liberation, for African consciousness, and for opposition to racism and poverty, his was a revolutionary spirit.

Although Marley was brought up Catholic he found his true

identity as a Rastafarian. A Rastafarian abstains from alcohol, to live as a Nazirite like John the Baptist or Samson, which means that the cutting of one's hair is not allowed. This finds its expression in dreadlocks. Whilst Rastafarians abstain from alcohol they celebrate the use of marijuana or 'ganja' and use it as a sacramental drug. They claim the use of marijuana is endorsed in Biblical Scripture. For example in Psalm 104:14 "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man."

I was surprised to learn the book of Revelation also contains a reference to the use of marijuana. You might be interested to know that our Unitarian hymnbook: *Hymns for Living*, also from the Rastafarian perspective, appears to endorse the smoking of marijuana. In hymn 198: *For the Healing of the Nations*, drawing on Revelations 22:2, we have the words: 'The river of life proceeded to flow from the throne of God, and on either side of the bank there was the tree of life, and **the leaf from that tree is for the healing of the nations.**' – Well you can't argue with that can you?

Bob Marley wrote and sang fantastic songs about love, compassion and revolution, about a new world that is possible. He wrote the song, *I Shot the Sheriff* and Eric Clapton's version helped catapult him to fame. Songs we will remember – *Buffalo Soldier*, *One Love/People Get Ready*, *No Woman No Cry* and *Get Up Stand Up* – are profound and inspiring songs.

But Bob Marley's words were also translated into deeds. He eschewed personal wealth in favour of people. His generosity was legendary. He gave the songwriter credits to the song, *No Woman No Cry* to a friend who ran a soup kitchen in Trenchtown. In 1976 right-wing gun men attacked and injured Marley and his friends. They fled to Britain. But he returned to Jamaica in 1978 at the request of the government and staged the One Love Peace Concert, at Kingston's National Stadium, it was a symbolic moment of national reconciliation.

The film was a joy to watch. It has received positive reviews because it reveals a Bob Marley who spoke out for the poor and the oppressed; worshipped God in his own way, and in a faith of his own choosing. He said, 'My life is only important if I can help plenty of people. In my life, there's just me and my own security. There'd be no wanting. My life is the people.' And when asked, 'Are you a rich man? You have a lot of possessions?' He replied, 'Possessions make you rich? I don't have those types of riches; my riches are life.'

The Rev Bob Pounder is minister at Oldham.

Happily proven wrong

A Church of Scotland minister once told me that the most important part of a Sunday service was the offering, or offertory, or collection as the English say. "It's the point where the worshippers make a real commitment to the ongoing work of the church," he explained. A similar thought is expressed in the cover notes of the Skinner House 2004 publication, *Offerings: Remarks on Passing the Plate* (UUA bookstore, Boston). "The offering is the one place in the worship service where people can make a difference." This is the only collection of writings I have ever seen about taking the collection, though many ministers have anecdotes to share about what to some is an unseemly chore, intruding on the worship 'gravitas'. Its author, the Rev Bob Thayer, UUA minister in Massachusetts, with whom I undertook a wonderful if brief exchange ministry in 1987, died recently, I'm sad to report. I'm glad I paid him a visit at his home only last November

In one piece in this delightful and thought-provoking book he recalls how he attended a church service in England with a friend, and at the appropriate moment produced a 20 pound note to put in the collection. "My friend shook his head at me. I raised my eyebrows at him – why not? He whispered, 'It's a rather large donation.' I felt indignant. Who was my friend to tell me I was giving too much? I flapped the twenty pound note in the air and whispered, 'Are you sure?' 'See the usher?' he asked. 'I know he will be in shock. He may fall down. He has never seen a 20 pound note in a collection except for famine relief in India.'"

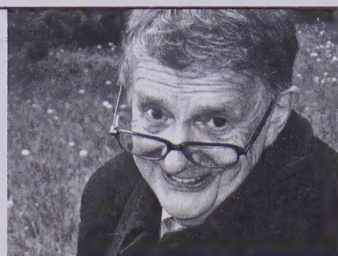
Rest in peace, Bob, your book is a generous gift to churchgoers everywhere. And whatever happened to exchange ministries?

I was pleased to be proved wrong in a prediction I had made about Sir Peter Soulsby, former convenor of the GA Executive Committee. I had guessed he would be too busy now to spare time for the Unitarian movement, but there he was, putting in an appearance at the Annual Meetings in Keele in April. "Last time I saw you, you were with the Queen, on TV," I said, recalling news reports of the royal visit to Leicester where he is now the elected Mayor. "Yes, and she was asking after you!" he quipped. Not many days after, there he was again, profiled in a major article in the *Guardian*, complete with smiling photograph and a CV that lists 'Chair, Leicester Unitarian congregation' as part of his public life, and adds 'narrow-boat enthusiast' among his interests. Alas, it didn't give the name of his boat, or I could watch out for him on the Leeds-Liverpool canal at the bottom of my garden. Anything else to note? Yes. In November he rejected a report from an independent panel recommending that his salary should be almost doubled. "It led me immediately to say, in the present climate, it's not acceptable," he maintains. That made me feel pleased to be wrong again, in the unworthy thoughts about politicians that sometimes cross my mind.

We often think of the *Guardian* as the Unitarian newspaper, a claim which historically has some validity. Also, it is often way ahead on social justice issues, notably the scandalous phone-hacking revelations. We can also resonate with the thought that some *Guardian* readers see themselves as a persecuted minority, or just ignored. Some correspondence described the difficulty people have in getting the paper in some

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



parts of the country. More than one newsagent has said, "We get no call for that one," and one man, in the Chesterfield Royal Hospital shop was told, "We don't get papers like that here, duck." Bad for one's health, one wonders? Meanwhile a hard-hitting drama, showing in Glasgow, about the trials and tribulations of the newspaper publishing industry, is worth a mention because of its title. It is called *Enquirer*, and is described as a shocking new play from the National Theatre of Scotland, and will move to London later this year. If it is as caustic and abrasive as the notices suggest, it is unlikely to give us hints on ways to increase our Unitarian paper's circulation. I'm glad it is spelt differently. I always make a point of writing 'inquire' or 'inquiry' with an 'i'. As far as I can tell, there is no difference between 'inquire' and 'enquire', so I use the 'i' version as a way of getting us some publicity. A bit subtle perhaps, but worth a try. Certainly I don't ever want us to be confused with *The National Enquirer*, the US sensationalist tabloid with an astonishing track-record of sex, violence and salacious editorials, plus some occasionally hilarious headlines: 'Astronaut seen to retain youthfulness as he nears black hole!' catches the attention all right, and 'Fisherman attacked by giant shrimp' makes me laugh. I don't think the *Guardian* will ever go in for stuff like that, and neither should we.

A St. George's Day event saw me taking afternoon tea with the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester and his wife. I was accompanying my wife Celia who has just completed a year as chaplain to the Mayor (a personal friend) of Trafford (where we used to live). I can never use the word 'sheriff' without thinking of the English folk hero Robin Hood, and singing to myself the unforgettable ditty from the 1950s TV series about his 'band of men, riding through the glen', or smiling as I recall the Mel (*Blazing Saddles*) Brooks spoof version, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*. My tea-time companion High Sheriff, however, was smartly dressed in a militaristic uniform with an array of medals and a shiny dress sword. We chatted about his role, a one-year term which is not merely ceremonial, as is widely believed, but includes representing the monarch, making sure that royal visits go smoothly, and 'oversight' of the judges when they visit the county during legal terms, including entertaining them at home. The High Sheriff is strictly non-political and it can be a costly year as it is an unpaid position, not even having an expenses allowance. Why would anyone want to take on such a duty? A high sense of public service, I suppose, plus a generous interest in supporting charities. Makes me wonder what would happen to such posts if the republicans took over. Replaced by a paid bureaucrat, I expect. Well, I shall not be putting my name forward in the hope of it being 'pricked' for it, a word which dates from the occasion when Queen Victoria, sitting sewing in the garden, poked her needle into the list of candidates to make her choice. Ministers and clergy are not eligible, and anyway, I would feel deeply uneasy in a quasi-military uniform carrying a sword, and even more uneasy in tights.

John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

Information for the assisted dying debate

To the Editor:

I am aware that a number of Unitarian congregations have set up meetings to discuss the issue of Assisted Dying.

There are two books which I would recommend to anyone who is considering facilitating a discussion on Assisted Dying. Both of these publications, in which much of the content is similar, consider the problems associated with Assisted Dying from slightly differing perspectives; 'Ethics and Medicine' and 'Liberal Christianity'.

Mary Warnock and Elizabeth MacDonald's book "*Easeful Death – Is there a case for Assisted Dying?*" contains a comprehensive examination of Assisted Dying from the perspective of Ethics and Medicine. The authors do not fudge the inherent dilemmas of changing the law or the extent of intractable suffering which many face at the end of their life. The book challenges many of the 'slippery slope' objections

to a change in the law.

Evidence is presented which makes clear that where Assisted Dying is already permitted, in the Netherlands and Oregon, there are safeguards in place to prevent its abuse and that the legislation has not resulted in 'vulnerable' members of society meeting either an unrequested or early death.

Paul Badham, in his book "*Is there a Christian Case for Assisted Dying?*" examines the objections to Assisted Dying which are raised by some Christians. In one of the most helpful sections of the book there is a discussion, with quotations from various theologians and the Bible, of what constitutes a Christian Act, those 'acts', which allow physical or mental suffering as a means of salvation or compassionate 'acts' which relieve or provide release from suffering? He cites the Golden Rule as a means of assessing which course of action could be considered the most Christian. In this book the author is not afraid to share his anguish of being alongside loved

ones whose demise, could never be described as a 'good' death. This book is 'real', compassionate, an invaluable resource for those who are not afraid to examine and reflect upon their position on Assisted Dying.

These books are widely available; I bought copies via the internet.

Ella Lewis-Jones

MA Medical Ethics

Highland Place Unitarian Church

Aberdare

Free hymnbooks available

To the Editor:

The Chapel Society of Manchester College Oxford has 65 copies of *Hymns of Faith and Freedom* ("the red book") to give away to any congregation(s) willing to collect them. Please contact Catherine Robinson on 01865 511307 or at catherine.m.robinson@homecall.co.uk

Catherine Robinson

Pulpit Secretary, MCO Chapel Society
www.ukunitarians.org.uk/oxford/

Thinking of training for the Unitarian ministry or lay pastorate?

Applications for training beginning in autumn 2013 should be received by Tuesday 02 October 2012. Short-listed applicants will be called for interview at Oxford on 2-3 January 2013.

For further information please contact:
Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,
1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

To discuss applying, please contact:
Rev Linda Phillips
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: lphillips@unitarian.org.uk

Ministry Inquiry Day

Want to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian minister or lay pastor/leader and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group is again holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training.

**Manchester, Luther King House:
Thursday 9th August**

11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 3rd August.

Advance booking is essential

To book, please contact Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY
Phone: 020 7240 2384
Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

YUU nurtures connections



By Kate Taylor

Among the priorities of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union is to encourage people from its member congregations to take part in the activities of the wider Movement. To this end it offers modest financial support. Sums are provided towards children and young people taking part in the youth events at the Nightingale Centre. Their letters of thanks show how much they gain from these. Adults who are not already subsidised as delegates can claim £50 towards the cost of attending the General Assembly's annual meetings.

In recent years the YUU has helped young adults to attend the Opus and ConCentric conferences run by the Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network in the United States and Canada. Support is given, too, for those who seek training via the Worship Studies course and, very recently, via REvolution.

Sometimes the YUU gains itself. A few years ago, Geoffrey and Kathryn Faiers provided an excellent Powerpoint presentation at a Quarterly Meeting of their experiences with the CUUYAN in Canada.

At the Quarterly Meeting in June this year, it was the turn of Chris Pilkington (Wakefield) and Claire Wilton (York) to lift us beyond the nitty-gritty of the busi-

ness meeting. They shared with us some of the ideas and activities for young people that they had culled from their experience of REvolution. We took part in ice-breakers, taking it in turn to hold a pine-cone and say a little about ourselves. Some of us took the handles of a brightly coloured parachute or was it a sunshade?) and dropped our hold if we wore black shoes and had to move into the middle. It was disappointing that the exercise stopped there! Perhaps we were too old!

Claire read us a story, *The Everlasting Seed*. We were not too old to enjoy that. Chris talked about encouraging young people to adopt a Social Action project. We wound up – or were wound up – as, throwing a ball of wool to one another and forming a web as it unwound, individuals spoke of what we had enjoyed about, or gained from, the session.

We met on this occasion at Pepper Hill Chapel, Shelf. Readers will know that our Pudsey Chapel has closed and been sold.

However, its bright red-seated chairs now enhance the worship space at Pepper Hill. And our hosts for the day have gained too by acquiring Pudsey's crockery, its vases, and its cassette-playing system.

Helping each other is at the very heart of the YUU.

Photos also by Kate Taylor, who is a member at Wakefield.



Chris Pilkington spoke on the REvolution course. (left) Claire Wilton read a story. The Pudsey chairs have a new home. (above)

Cyclists braved Beacon Hill to raise funds



Cycle for Youth riders Janet Costley, Annabel Kramer, Lori Winters, John Harley and Andreas Kramer are greeted by Jeff Jones, lay person in charge at Brighton Unitarian Church after a 50-odd-mile cycle ride through severe winds. (right) The cyclists were given a warm send off at Croydon Unitarian Church (left) with coffee and croissants earlier in the day and had tea at Ditchling Old Meeting House before the infamous Ditchling Beacon Hill! The cyclists raised funds for the Youth Programme and other chosen charities. A big thank you for our sponsors! To pledge funds please contact jharley@unitarian.org.uk

Plymouth church breaks fundraising record

Members and friends of Plymouth church have, during 2011/2012, raised the staggering amount of £1,000. This is double their usual annual target. A commendable effort and highly valued by Lynn Ferris, 37, daughter of member Anne Ashley. In the autumn of 2010 Lynn was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease, a devastating and incurable condition. In compassion and concern the church membership set about their fundraising efforts with added vigour.

The annual cream tea proved a great success. With the addition of live piano music passers-by were welcomed in by Lynn and her family wearing MNDA t-shirts.

A bookstall, held monthly, in the front garden of the church premises proved a popular attraction. Added to the monies raised from the selling of teas and coffees after the regular church services; donations received at the annual Christmas Carol Service and a collection at work organised by Lynn's sister Stephanie and you can see how the target was doubled. Anne, Lynn's mum, would like to add that Lynn has felt personally involved in the fund raising and the support of active fund raisers have given her added strength in her daily challenges of living with MND. In Lynn's own words, she feels "proud" of all the support. An already positive lady, the care and concern of others have increased her positivity and has thus been of immense value to her.

Among many other areas of support, The Motor Neurone Disease Association loans equipment such as laptops at a cost of £700,000 a year. They also strive to fund research in their aim of eventually curing MND.



Lynn's family would like to express their thanks to all who have contributed to this wonderful sum but in particular the Plymouth Church.

We wish every success to our church as they are currently fundraising for both Shelterbox and the local Hospice, St. Lukes. Photo: Anne Ashley (right) with Lynn and supporters at Plymouth Church.

York Unitarians search for ghosts, history



So who are they? Prospective tenants for this house 'To Let'? No, more like Unitarian ghost-hunters, as this house accommodates many. The Yorkshire Unitarian Union organised a

Spring Gathering in York in May and one of the attractions was a walking tour of the city, guided by the Rev Andrew Hill (centre, back). "Middleton House, 38 Monkgate, York," explained Andrew, "was the home of the Rev Charles Wellbeloved, and from 1803 to 1840 was also the home of Manchester College, York's original university-level institution the prime function of which was to train Unitarian ministers. It also had premises across the road, at the rear of a pub! College tutors were also much involved in the York Philosophical Society. The College later returned to Manchester, then moved to London and today is represented by Harris Manchester College Oxford." Among the ghosts that these visitors were trying to spot were those of James Martineau and William Gaskell, both of whom trained for the ministry here. If nothing else, the building surely merits a blue plaque? — John Midgley